AT MOTHER'S KNEE

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OZORA S. DAVIS

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AT MOTHER'S KNEE

Prayers to be Used in the Religious Training of Children in the Home

COMPILED BY
OZORA S. DAVIS

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INTRODUCTION

The collection of the material embodied in this manual has been going on for some years during the practical experiences of parish ministry. Repeatedly mothers have asked for some simple forms of prayer that would vary the familiar "Now I lay me down to sleep." A little boy finally asked the writer to tell him something new to say when he came to his good-night minutes with his mother and his heavenly Father. Therefore the interest that has prompted the collection of this manual has been practical.

It is more important to teach a child to pray than to say prayers; but how shall one pray without the forms that express the content of the uttered prayer? The great expressions of devotion that have stood the test of the centuries are still valid and valuable. Parents who have not the time to write or to seek out appropriate forms may find here, it is hoped, something useful in their high task of teaching children what it means to talk with God.

The words of Lyman Abbott in the Outlook of July 8, 1899, will indicate the deeper meaning which these forms may have for those who use them:

"Never attempt to give to your child the life you do not possess, however earnestly you may think he ought to have it; never hesitate to give to your child the life you do possess, however profoundly you may be ashamed that it is so little; and, under the guidance of teachers richer in some elements of life than yourself, seek those elements with your child, provided you really desire them for yourself as well as for him."

Chicago Theological Seminary
April, 1916

I

GRACE AT MEALS

Before Meals

I

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest,
And make the meal Thou givest blest.
—Familiar German Form.

II

God bless this food, and bless us all,
And keep us safe, what'er befall.
—Amos R. Wells.

III

Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.
—Child's Prayer Book.

IV

For the Father's many blessings
  Which to us each day doth bring,
May our lives be pure and holy
  As a glad thank-offering.

V

For these and all Thy gifts of love
  We give Thee thanks and praise;
Look down, O Father from above,
  And bless us all our days.

VI

God is great and God is good
And we thank Him for this food.
By His hand must all be fed,
Give us, Lord, our daily bread.

Response by all together:

God is great and God is good
And we thank Him for this food.

VII

O, grant Thy blessing, God, to rest
Upon this meal to make it blest;
And help us all to feel how good
Thou art to give us daily food.

—Rev. J. Vinson Stephens.

VIII

Make this home a Bethany, our Saviour. Sit with us at the table. Draw us from our worldly cares, as Thou didst draw Martha. Be our life, as Thou wert the life of Larazus. Show us, as Thou didst Mary, the better part. We ask it in Thy name.

—Amos R. Wells.

IX

In the midst of our work, dear Saviour, we gather around this table which is Thine. Thou hast covered it with Thy kindness and we praise Thee for Thy gifts to us. Transform this food into strength, O Lord, and the strength into noble service. We ask it in Thy name. Amen. —Amos R. Wells.

After Meals

X

Dear Father in heaven, we thank Thee to-day
For food and for clothing, for work and for play.
Now help us all gladly to do what is right
And bring us in health to our bedtime to-night.

XI

We thank Thee, our heavenly Father, for what Thou hast given us to eat and drink. Help us now to leave the table and do all our work for Thee, who lovest us and takest care of us always.

II

MORNING PRAYERS

When you pray at morning or evening, kneel down, to express your reverence, close your eyes to shut out all other thoughts than that God is near and loves you. Then be sure that He will hear your prayers and that He will do for you that which is best.

I

Heavenly Father, may I be
Good and kind, and live for thee.

II

In all I try to do and be,
Dear Father, bless and care for me.

III

Jesus, keep me safe to-day
In my work and in my play.
I will try to do and say
Only what is right.

—Rev. H. Edward Mills.

IV

Jesus, take this heart of mine,
Make it pure and only Thine.
I Thy little child would be,
Help me, Lord, to live for Thee.

V

For this new morning with its light,
For rest and shelter of the night,
For health and food, for home and friends,
For everything His goodness sends,
We thank the heavenly Father.

VI

Dear Lord, we thank Thee for thy care,
And all Thy mercy sends;
For food we eat, for clothes we wear,
Our health and home and friends.

VII

Father of Thee three things we pray:
To know Thee more clearly,
To love Thee more dearly,
To follow Thee more nearly
Every day.

VIII

Lord, keep us in Thy love this day,
And make us glad to do Thy will.
Help us Thy precepts to obey
And every duty to fulfil.

—Rev. Doane R. Atkins.

IX

We are little children
  Weak and apt to stray;
Saviour, guide and keep us
  In the heavenly way.

X

So many naughty things I see,
And learn to do them easily,
Dear Father, help me every day
From evil things to keep away.

—Translated from Erstes Lesebuch.

XI

I thank Thee, Lord, who safe hast kept
My soul and body while I slept.
Now keep me, Lord, through this new day
And lead me in Thine own good way,
And this in Jesus' name I pray.

XII

So happy do I wake from sleep,
So soft have been my slumbers deep,
I thank Thee, heavenly Father dear,
That all the night Thou hast been near;
Now guard me through the whole glad day
From doing wrong in word or play.

—William Hey (Translated).

XIII

Father in heaven, help Thy little children
To love and serve Thee all through this day.
Help us to be truthful, help us to be kindly,
That we may please Thee in all we do and say.

XIV

Now I wake and see the light;
'Tis God has kept me through the night.
To Him I lift my voice and pray
That He will keep me through the day;
If I should die before 'tis done,
O God, accept me through Thy Son.

—New England Primer (altered).

XV

Thou, Lord, hast kept me through the night;
I thank Thee for the morning light:
And grant, dear Lord, that I this day
May learn to love Thee and obey.

Where'er I go, whate'er I do,
May I be faithful, kind and true;
O, keep me pure, without, within,
And guard from danger and from sin.

—Joseph A. Torrey.

XVI

I thank Thee, Lord, for quiet rest,
And for Thy care of me;
O let me through this day be blest,
And kept from harm by Thee.

O, let me thank Thee, kind Thou art
To children such as I,
Give me a gentle, loving heart;
Be Thou my Friend on high.

—Beginners' Reading Book.

XVII

Our Father Who art in heaven above,
We thank Thee for Thy care and love.
O, keep us near Thee every day;
Forgive us for our sins, we pray,
And make us loving, pure and true
In all we think or say or do.
O, may we love and worship Thee
On earth and through eternity.

XVIII

Now before we work to-day
Let us not forget to pray
To God who kept us through the night
And woke us with the morning light.
Help us, Lord, to love Thee more
Than we have ever loved before·
In our work and in our play,
Be Thou with us through the day.

XIX

I praise Thee, Father, for the light.
O bless me, keep me in Thy sight,
That wheresoever I may go
Thy loving-kindness I may know.

If there be sorrow anywhere,
Or little children knowing care,
O Thou, who art the children's Friend,
Some new, undreamed-of gladness send.

Help me to live throughout this day
In such a simple, childlike way,
That joy to others I may bring
And have no fear of anything.

—Rev. W. E. Lawson

XX

I thank Thee, heavenly Father, for keeping me safe from danger through the night. Thou art good to me, and I want to love Thee and be Thy child. Help me not to do anything wrong to-day. May I be happy and kind and useful. Help me to be honest in all my work and fair in my play. May I find some place to-day where I may do a good turn to some one, and may I be kept from boasting when it is done. When night comes again may I be stronger and better than I am now because Thou hast taught and helped me. I ask it for my Master's sake.

XXI

The day returns and brings us the petty round of irritating concerns and duties. Help us to play the man, help us to perform them with laughter and kind faces. Let cheerfulness abound with industry. Give us to go blithely on our business all this day. Bring us to our resting beds weary and content and undishonored, and grant us in the end the gift of sleep.

—Robert Louis Stevenson.

III

EVENING PRAYERS

Form for Self-examination at Evening prayer:

Try to recollect what sins you have committed during the day—

1. By thought. Willingly entertaining bad, angry, impatient, unloving thoughts and desires.

2. By word. Using bad language, taking God's name in vain, lying.

3. By deed. Being disobedient, rude, cross or unkind; keeping bad company; doing any coarse deed; being idle.

4. By omission. Neglecting your lessons, your work at home, your opportunities to be helpful.

I

Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.[1]

[1] In the earliest form in which the prayer appears in the New England Primer (1777), the first line reads; "Now I lay me down to take my sleep." In 1784 this was changed to "Now I lay me down to sleep." The early form of definite statement rather than direct address in the second and fourth lines, was in accordance with the common custom of avoiding direct address to God, for the sake of reverence; for example, in the prayer of King Solomon at the dedication of the temple, "The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us" (1 Kings 8. 57). In the Primer of 1914, however, the change to direct address is made, and the lines read, "I pray Thee, Lord," instead of, "I pray the Lord." This hardly seems worth serious discussion, however; children have no trouble in understanding and using either form.

Suggested additions and changes:

1. Add a fifth line:
   And this I ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.

2. Add personal prayers for parents, kindred and friends, with the final petition to be forgiven for all wrong and for help to do right.

3. Change to the direct address:
   Now I lay me down to sleep.
   I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep.
   If I should die before I wake,
   I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take.

4. Now I lay me down to sleep.
   I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep.
   If Christ should come before I wake,
   I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take.

5. I lay my body down to sleep.
   I give my soul to Christ to keep.
   Wake I at morn, or wake I never,
   I give my soul to Christ forever.

6. Now I lay me down to sleep.
   I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep.
   In peace and safety 'til I wake,
   And this I ask for Jesus' sake.

7. Let me sleep in Thy strong arms,
Safe, O Lord, from all that harms;
If I nevermore should wake,
Save me, Lord, for Jesus' sake.

8. Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
But while I live I want to be
From quick and angry passions free.
With gentle thoughts and smiling face
And pleasant words in every place.
I pray, whatever wrong I do,
I may not say what is not true;
Be willing in my task each day,
And always honest in my play.
Make me unselfish with my joys,
And share with other girls and boys;
Kind and helpful to the old
And prompt to do what I am told.
Bless every one that I love, and teach
Me how to help and comfort each.
Give me the strength right living brings,
And make me good in little things.

9. Now I wake me up to work;
I pray Thee, Lord, I may not shirk.
If I should die before to-night,
I pray Thee, Lord, my work's all right.

[Morning Prayer.]

II

I thank Thee for the love so true
That watched o'er me the long day through.
Dear Jesus, keep me all this night
And wake me with the morning light.

III

Father, bless Thy child to-night;
Wake me with the morning light.
May I pure and holy be,
Daily growing more like Thee.

IV

Dear heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I have lived through another day; and now the night has come I pray Thee to take care of me while I sleep. And may I wake up in the morning strong and happy.

V

Blessed Lord, we thank Thee
  For Thy care to-day;
Make us good and gentle,
  Take our sin away.
Bless the friends who love us,
  From all evil keep;
May Thy holy angels
  Guard us while we sleep.

—Rev. Thomas Simms.

VI

Father, who keepest the stars in Thy care,
Me, too, Thy little one, childish in prayer,
Keep as Thou keepest the soft night through
Thy long, white lilies, asleep in Thy dew.

VII

Weary now I go to bed;
I close my eyes and rest my head.
Father, let Thy watchful eye
Be upon me as I lie.
For the wrong I've done this day,
Look not on it, Lord, I pray;
But forgive the ill I've done
For the sake of Christ, Thy Son.
For my friends so dear I pray:
Father, take them not away.
Let us all in peace awake
For Thy Son, our Saviour's sake.

VIII

Dear Father, whom I cannot see,
Smile down from heaven on little me.

Let angels through the darkness spread
Their holy wings about my bed,

And keep me safe, because I am
The heavenly Shepherd's little lamb.

Dear God, our Father, watch and keep
Father and mother while they sleep.

Teach me to do what I am told,
And help me to be good as gold.

—William Canton.

IX

Lord, Thou hast kept me through the day;
Keep me through all the night I pray.
Forgive the evil I have done;
And teach me how the wrong to shun.
Since Thou, O Lord, art always near,
No ill or danger will I fear,
And if I sleep or if I wake,
I trust Thee, Lord, for Jesus' sake.

—Joseph A. Torrey.

X

Dear Father, I thank Thee for all the beautiful things that Thou hast made, and I am happy, too when I think that God made me, and loves me, and takes care of me. I thank Thee for the home where so much is done to make me happy and good. Forgive me for all the wrong that I have done to-day and help me to do better to-morrow, for Jesus' sake.

XI

My Father, hear my prayer
  Before I go to rest;
It is Thy little child
  That cometh to be blest.

Forgive me all my sin,
  And let me sleep this night
In safety and in peace,
  Until the morning light.

Lord, help me every day
  To love Thee more and more,
And try to do Thy will
  Much better than before.

Now look upon me, Lord,
  Ere I lie down to rest;
It is Thy little child
  That cometh to be blest.

—E. C. W.

XII

Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me;
  Bless Thy little lamb to-night;
Through the darkness be Thou near me;
  Keep me safe till morning light.

All this day Thy hand has led me;
And I thank Thee for Thy care;
Thou hast clothed me, warmed and fed me;
Listen to my evening prayer.

Let my sins be all forgiven;
Bless the friends I love so well;
Take me, when I die, to heaven,
Happy there with Thee to dwell.

—Mary Lundie Duncan.

IV

GENERAL AND OCCASIONAL PRAYERS

I

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

—King James Version.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

—American Standard Version.

To Be Said Before Praying

II

Before my words of prayer are said,
I'll close my eyes and bow my head,
That I may think to whom I pray,
That I may mean the words I say.

III

To say my prayers is not to pray
Unless I mean the words I say,
Unless I think to whom I speak
And with my heart his favor seek.

Then let me when I come to pray
Not only mind the words I say,
But let me try with earnest care
To have my heart go with my prayer.

IV

Two little eyes to look joyful,
  One little face to be bright;
Two little hands to be helpful,
  Two feet to do errands right.
Two ears to hear words so loving,
  One tongue kind things to say;
One heart to love the Lord Jesus,
  Ten little fingers to obey.
Our two hands we fold together,
  Bow down our heads and then pray:
"Our Father . . ."

Motion Prayer

V

We fold our hands that we may be
From earthly play and work set free;
We bow our heads as we draw near
The King of kings, our Father dear;
We close our eyes, that we may see
Nothing to take our thoughts from Thee.
Into our hearts we pray Thee come,
And may they each become Thy home;
Cast out the sin and make them free,
Pure like the Christ-child may we be;
This is the prayer we bring to Thee.
Then open our eyes, Thy light to see,
Lift up our heads to praise Thee still,
Open our hands to do Thy will.

Sentence Prayers

VI

O Lord, I am happy because Thou lovest me, and I pray that I may never forget how much it pleases Thee when I am happy and good and useful.

VII

Heavenly Father, help me keep my temper just this minute.

VIII

Father in heaven, make me brave enough to try to do this hard thing for Thee.

IX

O God, keep me from being self-conceited because of this praise that has just been given to me.

X

My Father in heaven, give me the strength to be happy and helpful and patient at home while I am working during the rest of the day.

Prayer on Entering Church

XI

Heavenly Father, this is Thy house. Help me to be sure that Thou art here and near to me. Thou art unseen; but I can feel Thy presence. I bow down my head and hush all my thoughts about other things in order that I may know Thee. Help me to express my thanks and to praise Thee; teach me what is best for me to know; help me to decide to do Thy will. And forgive my sins in my Redeemer's name. Amen.

XII

Heavenly Father, I am Thy little child; help me to sit quietly, to listen carefully and understand the meaning of all that is done in church to-day.

Prayer Before Leaving Church

XIII

Accept, O Lord, all that has been said and done here for Thy glory and our good. Help me to remember the lessons and to continue to feel the better impulses that have come to me. May I not scatter or forget them by idle talk with others as I go home. And may Thy kingdom come on earth. Amen.

An All-Day Prayer

XIV

Our Father, Thou art giving us blessings all the time: help us to be a blessing.

Thou givest us these hands of ours: use them as Thine own.

Thou givest us these feet: send them on Thine errands.

Thou givest us our voices: hear them speak only gentleness and truth.

Thou givest us this mind that thinks: watch it thinking only clean, kind, noble thoughts.

Thou hast made our lives pleasant every day with love: we would make other lives gladder every day with our love.

Something to please Thee, Father, we would learn; some little deed to thank Thee with, instead of words;

some little prayer to do instead of say; some little thing to give Thee, who art never tired in giving us so much. Amen.

—The Way of Life.

Prayer at Christmas

XV

Come Thou, dear Prince, O, come to us this holy Christmas time! Come to the busy marts on earth, the quiet homes, the noisy streets, the humble lanes; come to us all, and with Thy love touch every human heart, that we may know that love, and in its blessed peace bear charity to all mankind.

—Eugene Field.

Prayer in Sickness

XVI

Dear heavenly Father, since I am sick, give me patience so that I may bear my pain without complaining. Help all those who love me and are taking care of me; and may we all be sure that I am Thy child and that Thou also art loving me and caring for me. Make me well and strong again when it is Thy will, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

—Translated from the German.

A Mother's Prayer

XVII

Christ, who was once a child like mine,
Save that a halo, love divine,
Shone ever round Thy head—
  Encircled by a mother's arm
  While angels kept from harm
The way her steps were led—
Christ, on my sleeping baby's brow
Rest once Thy hands in blessing now,
  This holy night,
And bid Thine angels near her stay,
To guide through all life's tangled way
  Her steps aright.

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